

**Thesis.**

**Matthew Arnold <sup>as a</sup> Reformer.**

For the Degree of

**B. A.**

*Ella Connet,*

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*U. of I.*

To recognize existing evils and to find and set in operation the remedy for these evils is an evidence of real greatness, and such is the mission of the reformer.

Matthew Arnold is essentially a critic, but he criticises that he may improve the condition of his fellow men by raising higher standards for them and showing them where and how to improve. If he succeeds in this he must be classed with the reformers of his time.

The pen being the chief instrument, by means of which he exerted his influence, the best method of determining that is by a study of his writings; and since *Culture and Anarchy*, and *Literature and Dogma* are representative works, they will serve as a basis from which to estimate his worth.

His purpose in writing the former he expresses as follows; "The whole scope of the essay is to recommend



culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically. And the culture we recommend is, above all, an inward operation:

In the first chapter of the essay, culture is defined as a study of perfection, and its object is described by the two mottoes: "To render an intelligent being yet more intelligent," and: "To make reason and the will of God prevail." The author observes that "The intellectual

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horizon is opening and widening all around," and that it is the time for culture to be of service. "It is a harmonious expansion of all the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature, and is not consistent with the over-development of any one power at the expense of the rest."

Perfection as culture presents it is a perfection, in which both beauty and intelligence are present, "which unites the two noblest of things 'sweetness and light'."

The English people are characterized by religious zeal which finds its most vigorous expression in the Puritans, of whom he says, "Do not let us deny the good they have accomplished, but do not let us fail to see that their idea of human perfection is narrow and inadequate" and "will never bring humanity to its true goal," but "culture enables a man to see that a tendency may be necessary and, even salutary, and yet the generations or individuals who obey



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this tendency are sacrificed to it; and that its mischiefs are to be criticised, lest it should take too firm a hold and last after it has served its purpose." Looking beyond the mere instrument its passion is for "sweetness and light" and to make them "prevail by seeking to do away with class; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current every where," yet still remaining the best thought of the time and "the true source therefore of sweetness and light."

The second chapter passes from the more especial consideration of sweetness to that of light. The first thought presented is that personal freedom is the central idea of English politics and social life; but that this principle, if carried to excess, tends toward anarchy. It finds nourishment in the social relations of the people, each class having some thing in its character especially adapted to it and the remedy for this placing of freedom

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as an end rather than a means, can be found only in light, which enables to look beyond the mere machinery to the purpose it should serve.

The author next observes the danger of over-looking the higher judgment of the people as a whole, "controlling as government the free swing of this or that one of its members in the name of the higher reason of all of them, his own as well as that of others."

Upon examining the characteristics of each class, no one is found capable of discharging the responsibilities of government, for each is jealous of power in the hands of the others, and overestimates the blessedness of doing just as one likes. Having considered that by the "ordinary self" they are "separate, personal, at war", but by the "best self", united, impersonal, at harmony", the next thing to do is to "find the best self and to seek to affirm that", not simply to do the best they know ~~know~~, but to seek to know the best



and to do that

Since, as he thinks, England is to experience a "revolution by due course of law", there must be great changes, and yet order must be preserved. It will be necessary, no matter who exercises the executive authority, to uphold that authority against any force that may arise or in any way threaten order.

In the third chapter "Barbarians, Philistines and Populace" these names are assigned to the aristocracy, middleclass, and working class respectively because of certain characteristics which each exhibits. But in using this classification two things are to be kept in mind; first that under all class distinctions there is a common basis of human nature, that makes each more indulgent to others, "a necessary element of sweetness"; and second: the tendency to do what the ordinary self dictates.

But there are those whose tendency is to rise above class

distinction, to see things as they are and to strive to make this universal. The development of this tendency depends largely upon circumstances and is encouraged by the better self of the nation, as expressed by the government, which, therefore, becomes a legitimate and powerful authority. Yet in religion, in literature, and even more in politics, owing to their habits, it is hard for Englishmen to comprehend the idea of the best self as a "paramount authority". What is wanted then is to make right reason act on individual reason, and he concludes, "We see then how indispensable to that human perfection which we seek is some public recognition and establishment of our best self - or right reason. We see how our habits and practices oppose themselves to such a recognition, and the many inconveniences which we therefore suffer, but now let us go a little deeper to find beneath our actual habits and practices, the very ground and cause out of which they spring."



The next chapter opens with, "This fundamental ground is found in our preference of doing to thinking". The energy for doing may be regarded as one force and the impulse to know and adjust the ideas, that form the foundation for practice, as another. From the nations that most signally exhibit these forces, the former is called Hebraism and the later, Hellenism. Although opposed to each other as seen in history, yet they have the same final aim—mans perfection, still they pursue this end in very different ways, and nothing can do away with this difference. Each originating in human wants, addresses itself to satisfying those wants, but, from the difference of method pursued, "The face human nature presents when it passes from the hands of one to those of the other is no longer the same". To banish ignorance and to see things in their beauty is the ideal of Hellenism, and by its simplicity and charm, it invests life with a "kind of ærial ease, and clearness, and radiancy".

filling it with "sweetness and light". For Hebraism, sin, the obstacle which opposes perfection "fills the whole scene".

In Greece where the dominant power was Hellenism, it failed of its object for lack of the necessary basis of conduct and self-control, then Hebraism became the ruling force.

Neither of them is the law of human development, but only a contribution to it, yet each appears august and invaluable according to the time and relation in which we take it, and the relation we hold to it. In the world's history they have alternated in holding sway, and each in turn contributed to the progress of mankind. The effect of race difference is taken up next. Hellenism is of Indo-European growth while Hebraism is of Semitic origin. Though of Indo-European stock and naturally belonging to the Hellenic movement, still the English people exhibit an affinity for the strength and moral fiber of Hebraism.

At the beginning of the Christian era, Hellenism having



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failed, Hebraism became prevalent. Through it lay the progress of mankind for fifteen hundred years, then came a reaction and ever since Hellenism has been the main current and Hebraism but a side stream, crossing, at times, the principal current. Hence the English tendency for the latter results in confusion, which can be remedied only "by enlarging the whole view and rule of life."

The next chapter opens with the consideration that the faults previously discussed, arise out of an undue regard for Hebraism, which fails, in that it takes no account of some sides of the nature. Its evil is in the tendency to become mechanical rather than spontaneous.

Both Hebraism and Hellenism he regards as necessary to the best development of character, and, since the tendency of his country men is toward the former, he feels the necessity of insisting upon the importance of the latter. He thinks that in the idea of perfection is to be found not only

the check from "following unreservedly a mean master-concern of any kind", but it "may even also bring new life and movement into that side of us with which alone Hebraism concerns itself, and awaken a healthier and less mechanical activity there." In conclusion he observes that the need is of a fuller, more harmonious development of our humanity, "spontaneity of consciousness, sweetness and light, and these are just what culture generates and fosters".

The charm of simplicity, both in thought and diction, prevails throughout the work. The reasoning is easy and accurate, and the thought clear.

As a man, cold and distant, the author failed to win the love of men, though he commands their respect by the intellectual attainments which so eminently fitted him for the work of a critic. He felt his superiority as a man of letters and estimated, very highly, the critic's authority.



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Usually just in his criticism, giving <sup>credit</sup> where it is due, yet at times he is severe, arousing the antagonism of those he censures. But honest practical people, though, at first wounded and exasperated by his severity, come finally to accept the truth in it and profit thereby.

By his criticism he has done much indeed to arouse his countrymen to the fact that wealth, prosperity, religious organizations, and political systems are not valuable in themselves, but only as they serve a higher end - that of perfecting the character, making it beautiful as well as strong, symmetrical, complete.

Culture and Anarchy is a criticism on the political and social features of the day, while Literature and Dogma is religious in its character.

Observing that the Bible is losing its hold on the people and recognizing its importance to their welfare, his purpose in writing the latter is to restore it to them.

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He defines his position thus: "Whatever is to stand must rest upon something that is verifiable. Now the assumption with which all the churches and sects set out, that there is a 'Great Personal First Cause, the moral and intelligent Governor of the Universe', and that from him the Bible derives its authority cannot, at present at any rate, be verified.

Those who 'ask for the reason and authority for the things they have been taught to believe', as the people, we are told, are now doing, will begin at the beginning. Rude and hard reasoners as they are, they will not consent to admit, as a self-evident axiom, the preliminary assumption with which the churches start. But this preliminary assumption governs every thing which in our current theology follows it. So if they are to receive the Bible, we must find for the Bible a verifiable basis and not an assumption. This new religion of the Bible the people may receive; the version now current of the



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religion of the Bible they never will receive.

Here, then is the problem: to find, for the Bible, a basis in something which can be verified, instead of in something which has to be assumed."

Though it can hardly be said of the masses, as a whole, that they are beginning to doubt the Bible for lack of a reasonable ground for believing it, yet many of them are beginning to ask why they should believe it, and many of the more intelligent are, at least neglecting the study of it, because its claims have not been presented in such a light as to attract their attention and satisfy their reason. In finding a verifiable basis for the Bible, then, he gives them something to arouse the interest and hold the attention, - leads them in a new and reasonable way.

He begins by drawing attention to the relatively large part of life that conduct occupies, and hence of its relative importance and just claim to thoughtful, earnest

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consideration; and proceeds, at once, to show that conduct-righteousness - is the theme of the Bible; and later that religion "morality touched with emotion", finds its highest inspiration here in the matchless life of Christ.

He sets forth the desire for righteousness as an especial characteristic of the Hebrew race, and a development by them, originating in their nature and their ability to see its relation to happiness. He presents them advancing from the idea: "In the way of righteousness is life" to the idea that real good is permanent, and to follow it is wisdom. By practicing righteousness, they feel that it is of a power beyond themselves, and realize their own inability to perceive the laws of their being. By using the light they have that light is increased and the exercise gives them pleasure. By dwelling on this idea of righteousness, it becomes, to them, a refuge, even a shelter, which alone is unfailing. And further by dwelling upon it, it becomes eminently



adorable and "altogether as a power which makes for righteousness, which makes for it unchangably and eternally," this is the origin of the Hebrew conception of God.

Naturally they crave happiness which they recognize as the result of righteousness, and hence righteousness itself: this is their greatness.

Experience being the basis on which he proposes to verify the teachings of the Bible concerning righteousness and its effect, he constantly appeals to it. After showing that history and experience accord with the Bible teaching, that selfindulgence produces misery, while selfcontrol brings happiness, he proceeds to the consideration that the study of the Bible inspires enthusiasm, and consequently insures success in the effort toward practicing righteousness. Of this he says: "If you want plastic art you go to Greece. And why? Because they have a specialty for these things; for making us feel what they are and, giving us an

enthusiasm for them. Well and so have Israel and the Bible a specialty for righteousness, for making us feel what it is, and giving us an enthusiasm for it. And here again we invoke experience. Try it.

Christ, the central figure of the New Testament, is presented as the one perfect character, his mission being to illustrate and bring out more forcibly the idea already advanced in the Old Testament that righteousness is, in reality, a matter of the heart, and that conduct is but the result of this inner life. This he calls "Christ's method." His "secret" as expressed by, "He that loveth his life shall lose it and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal"; the author finds to be the second great element of Christ's life and success. The third element "sweet reasonableness" completes his life - makes it stand out preeminently - the one perfect character. Through this third element both the "method and secret" are exhibited



Arising out of the tendency of the time to look for the wonderful, and from the Jewish literal application of the Old Testament writings, after the coming of Christ, "Aberglaube" reinvaded, showing itself in a literal application of his words and those of his disciples. Out of this sprang the creeds which make the basis of all Christian doctrine. The working of miracles he regards as proving neither the truth or falsity of the Bible teachings. He considers the belief in them but another evidence of the "extra-belief", but observes that this extra-belief has been a means, by which many have held on to the deeper and more essential truth.

But he feels that the time has come to know and make known the facts in the case. The reader can not help being impressed with his sincerity of purpose, whatever may be the conclusion he arrives at.

Faith, that stumbling-block for so many, because they

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think it a blind acceptance of something that is not understood, faith he places upon a higher and worthier plane. To him it is, "The being able to cleave to a power of goodness appealing to our higher and real self, not to our lower and apparent self. Attaining, cleaving, attaching ones self fast to what is undeniably true - this is what the faith of the Scriptures, in its very nature is.

That the Bible language is literary and poetical, not scientific and exact, is the fundamental idea of the book, and its whole tenor is to show that the Bible teaching is essentially spiritual, dealing with the principles of conduct and life, rather than establishing exact forms or methods of applying them. In this way he shows that it is adapted to the needs of all men in every circumstance of life.

He is ever combating the worship of machinery-dogma, which he finds to be the Englishman's bane in religion



as well as in political and social life. But for him religion has a much deeper meaning and he strives to help others to see this deeper meaning.

Much evil, no doubt, has resulted from excessive zeal for some set form of belief. This evil he hopes to remedy by bringing out the immensely greater importance of righteousness, which finds its motive in religion.

He has been accused of vagueness and, indeed, it seems, at times, as though he had left nothing tangible, nothing to bind one to the practice of righteousness. In his cold intellectual presentation of the matter he obscures much of that element which arouses emotion, and leaves the reader in doubt as to how he shall attain this most desirable end.

But on the other hand it is to be remembered that his object is to procure students of the Bible, rather than disciples for himself. He leaves the Bible to make its own

impression upon the reader, - leaves him free to find in its pages whatever creed best supplies his needs.

Doubtless men have not yet come out into the full light of religious truth, but as they are prepared for it they will do so.

If Matthew Arnold, by the aid of his superior talents and broader culture, is able to see more clearly, and assists others to rise to broader clearer views of the truth, he must be reckoned among the great men of his time, though he may not have gained the whole truth.

Whatever aids in banishing superstition, cant, and all those repulsive forms, generated by ignorance; and in making religion a matter of sober, earnest, and intelligent thought is, indeed, beneficial. And our authors influence is, certainly, in this direction. Those who were inclined to neglect the Bible and its teachings will be drawn toward it, and those who, at first, may be disturbed and unsettled in



their belief will be led to consider the matter more carefully and intelligently, to discard that which is useless, and sooner or later they will return to all that was really good. Such has been the history of great disturbances of the public mind in the past. Such was the effect of the life and work of Wiclif, of Luther, of Christ himself. And thus it appears that the influence of Matthew Arnold was exerted in the direction of that "Great Power which makes for righteousness."